

My name is Tri Ho, and I am a resident of New Haven and student at Yale University. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for H.B. 5033, an Act addressing the needs of food-insecure students at public institutions of higher education. This bill would require public institutions of higher education to assess and address food insecurity among students and to increase access to the supplemental nutrition assistance program for eligible students at institutions of higher education.

First, black and low-income students are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. Nationally, more than forty percent of college students are experiencing food insecurity before graduation, and Connecticut is no exception. A study done by the University of Connecticut estimated that around thirty-five percent of Connecticut college students suffer from food insecurities. Amongst these alarming statistics, black students constitute fifty-eight percent, which is nineteen percentage points higher than the overall rate for students identifying as White or Caucasian. Students experiencing food insecurity have a lower average GPA, a higher proportion of a depression diagnosis, and a higher proportion that are nutritionally deficient compared to food-secure students.

Second, while the benefits of the temporary change in SNAP eligibility and enrollment assistance have substantially proven to benefit food insecurity students, there need to be additional steps taken at the state level to provide access to nutritious foods for students. Historically, students enrolled at least part-time at a higher education institution are generally ineligible for SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption. However, The Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 temporarily extends SNAP eligibility to students enrolled at least half-time at a higher education institution. This act has substantially benefited and provided economic relief during the pandemic for those who qualify for federal work-study and Federal Pell Grant. This exemption was only held through thirty days after the COVID-19 public health emergency was lifted. Therefore, this bill would seek to, as amended from time to time, extend SNAP benefits to any student enrolling in one of seventy-eight higher education institutions in the state if such student receives work-study as part of a financial aid package to attend such institution.

Thirdly, this bill has significant precedents in both other states and Connecticut. The Hunger-Free Campus Act has been implemented in five other states and introduced in ten different states, including Florida, North Carolina, and Oklahoma. This act seeks to establish a building office to support public higher education institutions to address gaps in student food insecurity and hunger on college campuses using interventions that reflect best practices. In Connecticut, we have already made progress with the College 5 Hunger Gap Act of 2021, requiring the government to inform students about their SNAP eligibility through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) information. Clearly, our state already recognizes the unique need to address food insecurity for college students. We must continue to build upon this progress through the passing of this bill.

As a former public high school student, I understand firsthand the worries surrounding hunger and food insecurity in school and their detrimental effects on one's ability to perform and excel in higher education. The only difference is that I have had the privilege of attending a higher education institution that provides an adequate and satiated meal plan that often never leaves me going to bed hungry. Unfortunately, for more than a third of college students in our states, especially more than half of black and brown students, they cannot say the same. We have already made great progress in combating food insecurity in Connecticut, but this bill would go further to establish an equitable food assistance program to provide college students with basic nutritious needs to excel both in and out of the classroom. Because of these frightening statistics, because of their adverse impacts, and because of every single college student that is suffering from hunger, I urge the committee to please vote favorably on this bill. Thank you for your time.